

SUETONIUS AND HIS BIOGRAPHIES.

BY JOHN C. ROLFE.

(Read April 17, 1913.)

Suetonius' "Lives of the Cæsars" is a work which is less well known to us than it ought to be. Its frequent citation in historical writings and in treatises on Roman antiquities might seem to make this statement a questionable one, but it is justified both by the rarity of the appearance of the author in our college courses of study, and by the publication of so few editions of the "Cæsars" or of individual lives in English; while no full and satisfactory commentary exists in any language, so far as I know.

The work has the unusual distinction of three *editiones principes*, of which two appeared in Rome in 1470 within a few months, and one in Venice the year following. Between that date and 1820 more than forty editions were issued, including some reprints, under the names of such scholars as Erasmus, Stephanus, Casaubon, Burmann and Ernesti. Bentley commenced an epoch-making edition which was never finished, and between 1606 and 1706 three translations into English were made.

Since 1820 the publications dealing with the "Cæsars" have been relatively few. In 1858 C. L. Roth issued a text which was the standard until 1906, when L. Preud'homme published a new recension, followed the next year by that of M. Ihm. No commentary on the entire work has been made since that of Baumgarten-Crusius in 1816, several times reprinted and with some additions by Hase (Paris, 1826). This is naturally not up to date, besides being far from complete. In English we have had editions of the "Julius and Augustus,"¹ the "Augustus,"² and "Tiberius-Nero,"³ and com-

¹ H. T. Peck, New York, 1893².

² E. S. Shuckburgh, Cambridge (England), 1896.

³ J. B. Pike, Boston, 1903.

mentaries on "Claudius"⁴ and "Galba-Vitellius"⁵ have been published abroad. Ihm seems to have had a full commentary in mind, but the appearance of this, as well as of his new text of the fragments, has been delayed, if not prevented, by his untimely death. A survey of the philological journals, both in English and in foreign languages, shows few articles dealing with Suetonius, compared with the number of those devoted to the text and elucidation of many other Roman writers.

The neglect of an author once so popular may be attributed in the main to two causes: first, to a more critical attitude towards the Roman writers as regards their style and a tendency to restrict the reading of the modern student to those which are rated as "classical" in the restricted sense of the term; and secondly, to a more rigorous standard in historical investigation, which has thrown discredit on Suetonius as a source.

While Suetonius must be condemned on both these counts, there are reasons which make the relegation of his biographies to comparative obscurity unfortunate. They are a mine of information on public and private antiquities, they are of surpassing interest for their wealth of anecdote and curious detail, and they are an important representative of a branch of ancient literature of which few examples have come down to us.

The vogue of Suetonius in still earlier days than those of the printed editions is shown by the great number of existing manuscripts, which are counted by hundreds. These are all apparently derived from a single survival, which formed a part of the library at Fulda in 844, as we know from a letter of Servatus Lupus,⁶ abbot of Ferrières, at whose request a copy was sent to France and extensively copied. The original *codex Fuldensis* has since been lost.

As in the case of Horace, a multiplicity of manuscripts has rather added to the difficulties of editors than favored their attempts to establish a standard text. The greater number belong to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and are suspected of containing the cor-

⁴H. Smilda, Groningen, 1896.

⁵C. Hofstee, Groningen, 1898.

⁶L. Traube, *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere Deutsche Geschichtskunde*, XXVII., pp. 266 ff.; cf. *Hermes*, XL., p. 179.

rections and interpolations of the scholars of that period. The emendation of a text disfigured by lacunæ and errors began in fact at an earlier period and had tended to disguise the readings of the archetype as early as the twelfth century.

We have a few manuscripts of admitted superiority, the *Memmianus* of the ninth century, the *Gudianus* of the twelfth, and *Vaticanus 1904*, of about the same date as the latter, but unfortunately coming to an end in the third chapter of the "Life of Caligula." Of these the first is comparatively free from emendations, but it has numerous errors and lacunæ, including the extensive gap at the beginning of the "Life of Julius." The missing portion of this "Life" was apparently still in existence in the sixth century, when Johannes Lydus used a codex⁷ containing the missing dedication to C. Septicius Clarus, prefect of the prætorian guard, and hence presumably the opening chapters of the "Life of Julius." These must therefore have disappeared between the sixth and the ninth centuries. To the evidence for their existence, which has been questioned by some, we may add a statement of the commentator Servius⁸; "Suetonius ait in vita Cæsaris responsa esse data per totum orbem nasci invictum imperatorem." This remark, if we may trust Servius for its genuineness, must have been made in the missing portion of the "Life of Julius." Moreover, the general plan of the biographies obliges us to assume a lacuna, and the arguments against it are wholly unconvincing.

The rest of the manuscripts fall into two classes, each represented by numerous codices, of which the second contains more errors and emendations than the first. Individually the manuscripts are of comparatively little value, but their archetypes, whose readings may be recovered from their agreement, are more important, especially that of the first class, which seems to be derived from the same original as the *Vaticanus*.

There is comparatively little difference of opinion as to the value and relationship of the earlier manuscripts. Ihm and Preud'homme, as the result of careful and independent investigations, arrived at

⁷ "De Magistr.," 2, 6, p. 102 Fuss.

⁸ On Verg. "Æn.," VI., 799.

substantially the same conclusions, and while they differ in their estimate of the relative importance of some few codices, their texts show very slight and unimportant variations one from the other. We might therefore regard the text of Suetonius' "Cæsars" as settled, barring the possibility of the discovery of new material, were it not for the difference of opinion as to the independent value of the later manuscripts.

These codices frequently offer readings superior to those of the earlier ones, but, as has been said, it is suspected that they are the corrections of scholars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and hence of no weight in determining the readings of an archetype. This conclusion was reached by Roth in 1858, but it has since been called in question by various scholars.⁹ At present, however, the weight of evidence is on Roth's side, since Ihm and Preud'homme have arrived at the same conclusion through more extensive and thorough studies¹⁰ than have as yet been made public by the supporters of the contrary view. As a matter of fact, except for greater conservatism in the later editions, which is in accord with the current conception of textual criticism, and greater reserve in filling lacunæ, the texts of Ihm and Preud'homme show remarkably few deviations from that of Roth, so that any radical changes must be the result of the demonstration of the independent value of the later manuscripts or of the discovery of fresh material.

As to Suetonius himself our information is somewhat scanty, since he is one of many Roman writers who make few allusions to themselves; in fact the character of his work is not such as to call for revelations of that kind. What we do know is derived for the most part from the "Letters" of the younger Pliny, to whom we

⁹ Chr. Modderman, "Lectiones Suetonianæ," Groningen, 1892; H. N. Veldhuis, "Annotationes Criticæ," Leyden, 1897; C. L. Smith, *Harvard Studies in Class. Phil.*, XII. (1901), pp. 54 ff.; A. A. Howard, *id.*, pp. 261 ff.; and others.

¹⁰ Preud'homme, "Première, deuxième, troisième étude sur l'histoire du texte de Suétone de vita Cæsarum," in the *Bulletins de l'Académie royale de Belgique*, 1902, and *Mémoires couronnés et autres mémoires publiés par l'Académie royale de Belgique*, LXIII., pp. 1-94; Ihm, *Hermes*, XXXVII., pp. 690 ff. and the introd. to his edition, Leipzig, 1907.

also owe information about his uncle, the elder Pliny,¹¹ Silius Italicus,¹² Martial,¹³ and other writers of the day. C. Suetonius Tranquillus, as he himself tells us,¹⁴ was the son of Suetonius Laetus, a Roman knight, who in April of the year 69, as tribune of the Thirteenth Legion, took part in the battle of Betriacum, where Otho's forces were defeated by those of his rival Vitellius. In other casual allusions of a personal nature, four in number,¹⁵ Suetonius gives us no additional information of importance, although they are of some help in drawing conclusions as to the date of his birth.

His birthplace is unknown. Arguing *ex silentio*, it is possible to infer that he was one of the few Roman writers who were born in the city itself.¹⁶ The dates of his birth and death are also uncertain. The former is assigned by Mommsen¹⁷ to the year 77; by Macé with somewhat greater probability to 69.¹⁸ To determine the exact year is impossible, but the facts of his life, so far as we know them, point to the beginning of the reign of Vespasian. The date of his death is equally uncertain. Our last reference to him as still living is in the year 121, but the implication in one of Pliny's letters¹⁹ that he was slow to publish, taken in connection with the long list of his writings, would seem to indicate that he must have lived to a good old age, including a part of the reign of Antoninus Pius.

From another of Pliny's letters, a reply to a request to have a suit in which his friend is about to plead postponed in consequence of an unfavorable dream,²⁰ we learn that Suetonius practised at the

¹¹ III., 5; VI., 16 and 20.

¹² III., 7.

¹³ III., 21.

¹⁴ Otho, 10, 1.

¹⁵ Calig., 19, 2; Domit., 12; Nero, 57, 2; cum post viginti annos (after Nero's death), adulescente me, extitisset condicionis incertae qui se Neronem esse iactaret; Gr. 4.

¹⁶ The number of these is at most small, and there is no writer of prominence about whom it can be asserted positively; it is probable in the cases of Cæsar, Lucretius and Suetonius; cf. Macé, "Essai sur Suétone," Paris, 1900, pp. 33 ff.

¹⁷ *Hermes*, III., p. 43.

¹⁸ *L. c.*, pp. 35 ff.

¹⁹ V., 10.

²⁰ I., 18.

bar, at least for a short time. From a third reference of Pliny²¹ Macé and others have assumed that Suetonius was a teacher, and the former, with the imagination characteristic of French scholarship, constantly refers to him as a "maître d'école" and draws inferences from his profession. But the most natural interpretation of *dominis scholasticis* in the passage in question is "scholars turned land-holders," and there seems to be no evidence whatever that Suetonius was a schoolmaster.

Pliny's acquaintance with Suetonius was evidently an intimate one, since he twice refers to him as *contubernalis*.²² This term, too, seems to imply that the two men were of approximately the same age and hence to support the view that Suetonius was born as early as the year 70. An equality in years is not inconsistent with the reverence²³ which he felt for his distinguished friend, whose position was so much higher than his own, and it is in accord with "Epist.," IX., 34, in which Pliny consults Suetonius as to the advisability of reading his verses in public.

Suetonius held no official position in his earlier years. Through Pliny's good offices he secured a military tribunate,²⁴ but soon had it transferred to a relative, Caesennius Silvanus. The same good friend secured for him the *ius trium liberorum* from Trajan,²⁵ although this privilege was not justified by the number of his offspring. That his marriage was unhappy, as well as unfruitful (*parum felix*), is a pure inference. Pliny himself was childless, though he too received the *ius trium liberorum* from Trajan²⁶; but the happiness of his wedded life is apparent from several of his letters.²⁷

The letters of Pliny which refer to Suetonius cover approximately the period from 96 to 112. When we next hear of him,²⁸

²¹ I., 24, 4.

²² I., 24, 1; cf. X., 94, 1.

²³ III., 8, 1: *reverentia quam mihi præstas*.

²⁴ III., 8.

²⁵ X., 94, 95. The *lex Papia Poppæa* deprived childless men of one half of the legacies and inheritances left them, which made the *ius trium liberorum* particularly in demand.

²⁶ X., 2.

²⁷ IV., 19; VI., 4, 7; VII., 5; VIII., 10.

²⁸ Spartianus, "Vit. Hadr.," 11, 3.

he is holding the responsible position of secretary under Hadrian (*Ab epistulis*, referred to by Spartianus by the later title of *epistularum Magister*). It is altogether probable that he owed this position to the influence of his friend and patron C. Septicius Clarus, to whom he dedicated the "Lives of the Cæsars," and that he held it while Septicius was prefect of the praetorian guard, from 119 to 121. Spartianus tells us in the same passage that both Suetonius and Septicius were dismissed by Hadrian, "quod apud Sabinam uxorem iniussu eius familiariter tunc se egerant quam reverentia domus aulicæ postulabat." While this statement is far from definite, the words *iniussu eius* certainly imply some violation of court etiquette rather than any more serious misconduct. After this we lose sight of Suetonius, but it seems probable that he lived in retirement and devoted himself to study and publication.

Our references give us the impression of a man of quiet, scholarly tastes and habits, of no great ambition in other directions, who enjoyed the friendship of a number of distinguished men and from his connection with them and his position under Hadrian had the opportunity of gathering a great amount of information. This is confirmed by the allusions to his works, which are considerably more numerous, as well as by his reputation in later times. According to the fashion of his later years, when the greater part of his books were published, he seems to have written in Greek as well as Latin, although the fact that the titles of some of his works are known to us only in their Greek form is due to the sources in which they have been preserved. The lexicographer Suidas, of the tenth century, has given us a catalogue of his writings,²⁹ which has been supplemented from other sources,³⁰ while other references throw some light on the extent and interrelation of some of the books.³¹ They are in the general fields of history (biography), antiquities, natural

²⁹ *S. v.* Τράγκυλλος

³⁰ *Ps. Aur. Vict.*, "Epit.," 14; *Servius* on "Æn.," VII., 627; *Lydus*, "De Magistr.," 3, 64, p. 268 *Fuss*; *Auson.*, "Ep.," 19, p. 180 *Schenkl*; *Charisius*, "Gr. Lat.," I., 236, 17 *K.*; etc.

³¹ *Isidore*, "De Nat. Rerum," 38 and 44; *Priscian*, VIII., 20 and 21, XVIII., 149.

history and grammar, and comprise eighteen titles, which are variously arranged by different scholars.³²

Of all these works only the "Lives of the Cæsars" has come down to us practically entire.³³ We have besides considerable portions of the "De Viris Illustribus," biographies of illustrious Romans in the fields of literature and philology, and numerous detached fragments from other books, preserved in the form of citations and excerpts by later writers.

While the historian of Latin literature can hardly class Suetonius higher than second rate, his influence was greater than that of many more eminent writers, partly because of his relatively high rank in the period of his activity, but especially because his "Lives of the Cæsars" appealed to the spirit of the age. Because of this they gave a biographical turn to historical writing which endured for centuries. They served as a model for Marius Maximus, who lived from about 165 to 230, and for the writers of the Augustan History ("Scriptores Historiæ Augustæ") of the time of Diocletian and Constantine, while Tacitus found a follower only in Ammianus Marcellinus (330-400). Their influence extended to the Christian writers, as appears from the biography of Ambrosius by his secretary Paulinus, and even to the Middle Ages, when Einhardus took the same pattern for his "Life of Charles the Great." Eutropius, Aurelius Victor and Orosius drew on him freely and often transcribe his language so faithfully as to be of some little value in questions of textual criticism; and he was used as a source by Greek writers such as Cassius Dio, Lydus, and others.

His other biographies were not neglected: Apuleius made use of his book "On Famous Courtesans," Hieronymus wrote of the "Illustrious Men" of the Church in imitation of Suetonius' work of the same title, while the ecclesiastical chronographers, such as Julius Africanus, drew on his treatise "On the Kings."

His antiquarian and grammatical works were equally influential. Tertullian based his "De Spectaculis" on a similar work of Sue-

³² See Macé, *l. c.*, p. 355; Schanz, "Geschichte der römischen Litteratur," Part 3, pp. 53 f.; etc.

³³ See page 208, above.

tonius, while Censorinus, Solinus, Macrobius, the commentator Servius, the scholiasts on Horace, Germanicus and Juvenal, the grammatical writers, and especially Isidore, the learned bishop of Seville, excerpted him freely and extensively. In this field, too, his influence extended to the Greek and Byzantine writers and inspired and furnished material for numerous works on natural history in the Middle Ages.

From its title and its general form the "Lives of the Cæsars" is naturally classed as biography, and it is also numbered among our historical sources. Strictly speaking, however, it is neither history nor biography. Great historical events are dismissed in a brief chapter, like Cæsar's Gallic campaigns, or with a casual allusion, as in the case of the defeat of Varus. Constitutional history receives relatively greater attention, but this too is subordinated to the personality of the emperors, about whose qualities and characteristics the minutest and most intimate details are given. Chronology is neglected, except for the dates of birth and death.

But when we examine the "Lives" as biography, we find them lacking in some of its most essential features. As a matter of fact, biography as the "faithful portrait of a soul in its adventures through life"³⁴ has reached its full development in comparatively modern times, and even now there is not entire agreement as to its function. The writer in Larousse's "Dictionnaire Universelle," for example, says:³⁵ "la biographie ne s'occupe que de la vie humaine, et elle ne l'étudie que dans les actions extérieures des individuels." Yet I think that most of us would agree that a biography in the true sense of the word should be more than a mere catalogue and should show the development of character as the result of heredity, education and environment. Of this there is practically nothing in Suetonius. He rather furnishes us with the raw material for biographies and his "Lives" differ from the modern conception as widely as do annals from history.³⁶ It does not occur to him to make comparisons between the various individuals whom he portrays, or to draw the psychological deductions that cannot escape

³⁴ *Encycl. Brit.*, s. v., III., p. 952.

³⁵ *S. v.*, II., p. 257.

³⁶ See Sempronius Asellio in Gellius, V., 18, 5 ff.

the thoughtful reader. In the "Life of Caligula" he gives us an appreciative sketch of the noble father Germanicus, leaving the reader to note the contrast with his unworthy son. He does, it is true, express the opinion that the latter was sound neither in body nor mind, but he attributes to this, not his acts of madness and his change from benevolence to tyranny, but merely the existence in the same man of two opposite traits, contempt of the gods and extravagant fear of thunder and lightning.³⁷ He has noted this same fear in Augustus, who had good reason for it in a narrow escape from death, and in Tiberius; but he has no thought of regarding it as a family trait: still less as a form of degeneracy or the effect of a guilty conscience.³⁸

It is unnecessary to multiply examples of this kind. His method is sufficiently illustrated by his own remarks.³⁹ It consists in general in giving an outline of the life of his subject, commonly preceded by a sketch of the history of his family, and followed by an enumeration of his deeds in war and in peace and an account of his private life and habits. His good and bad qualities are presented in separate lists, rarely with comment of any kind.⁴⁰

The "Lives" differ no less from the original Greek conception of biography than from that of modern times. The former consisted in a description of the ideal *βίος*, the art of living, as a model for imitation,⁴¹ and the type endured for many centuries. In this aspect biography approaches the domain of philosophy, and Wilamowitz finds its beginnings in Plato, although it did not become common until the Hellenistic period. Our greatest example is of course the "Parallel Lives" of Plutarch, who was a young man in the days of Nero and probably wrote his biographies under the Flavian emperors, although they were not published until a later time. Side by side with the philosophical biographies, however,

³⁷ Calig., 51, 1.

³⁸ Cf. Juvenal, XIII., 223 ff.

³⁹ Aug., 9, 61, 94; Tib., 61; Calig., 22; Nero, 19.

⁴⁰ See, however, Tib., 21; Vesp., 16, 3; Titus, 1; 10, 2, etc., and on the last-named cf. Leo, "Die griechisch-römische Biographie," pp. 9 ff.

⁴¹ See Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in "Kultur der Gegenwart," I., 8, pp. 116 ff.

though of somewhat later origin, we have the so-called "grammatical" type of the Peripatetics, originally designed as introductions to works of literature and drawing their material in a great measure from those works themselves, but afterwards extended to men eminent in other fields.⁴² These are of the same general character as those of Suetonius, and undoubtedly influenced the form of his "Lives of Illustrious Men" and of his "Cæsars."

In considering the indebtedness of works of Roman literature to Greek models we must make a distinction between form and contents. It is well known that the Romans had made beginnings in various lines of literary endeavor before their introduction to the masterpieces of the Greeks, which would have resulted in the development of a native literature quite different from that which we may properly call Græco-Roman. Although this development was checked, it is equally well known that from the outset the Roman writers showed originality in the use of their models, for example, in the "contamination" of Greek plays and in the early invention of the *fabula prætexta* and *fabula togata*. But the influence of the form of the Greek writings was powerful from the beginning, and as time went on, regular rules for the various classes of literary composition were formulated, from which a rhetorically trained writer seldom ventured to deviate. This, however, is not necessarily attended with a lack of originality in the subject matter and its treatment. Horace for instance in his "Odes" followed the general principles and metrical schemes of Alcæus and Sappho, as he freely admits,⁴³ but as Professor Gildersleeve has graphically expressed it:⁴⁴ "if Alkaios and the rest of the nine lyric poets were to rise from the dead, Horace would still be Horace." Similarly it does not detract in the least from the merits of the "Agricola" as a masterpiece of literature that its author followed the traditional rules for the compo-

⁴² While it was maintained by Leo that these were composed on a generally uniform plan, the newly discovered "Life of Euripides" by Satyros shows a departure from the norm in being cast in the form of a dialogue, with one principal and two minor interlocutors.

⁴³ "Odes," III., 30, 10: Dicar . . . Princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos Deduxisse modos.

⁴⁴ *Amer. Jour. of Phil.*, XXXIII., p. 360.

sition of encomiastic biography.⁴⁵ Therefore the fact that Suetonius took as his model the "grammatical" biographies of the Greeks does not mean that the Romans derived the idea of that branch of literature from across the seas. On the contrary, there are good reasons for supposing that biography was one of the numerous forms of writing in which a beginning had been made before the days of Livius Andronicus, and it seems altogether probable that considerable progress had been made before that time.

At first thought we should not be inclined to look to the Romans for a form of literature in which the personal element is so strong, at least in the earlier period of their history. It is a commonplace of criticism that at the beginning of their national life they were led by their situation to form a military and political organization in which the interests of the community were paramount and those of the individual distinctly subordinate. To this we may attribute the late and exotic impulse to many forms of creative literature and the prominence given to military science and to law. Heine's witty characterization of the people as "eine casuistische Soldateska" contains as much truth as any generalization epigrammatically expressed. The Greeks, on the contrary, exalted the individual, and their greatness in literature and the arts was in marked contrast to their failure to achieve political unity, and their consequent early relation to Rome of *Græcia capta*. That they were so late in developing a biographical literature is doubtless to be attributed to their original notion of the moral and didactic function of that class of writing and its subordination to other forms of philosophical teaching, and to the relatively restricted nature of the "grammatical" biography in its earlier stages.

In spite of the suppression of the individual in early Rome, there were certain customs which favored the production of biographies of a laudatory character, the purpose of which was in part moral precept, as with the Greeks, and in part the gratification of national and family pride. We are told that it was usual at banquets to sing the praises of illustrious men and their houses. Cicero twice alludes

⁴⁵ See Hendrickson, "The Proconsulate of Cn. Julius Agrippa," *Univ. of Chicago Decenn. Publ.*, VI., 29 ff.

to this custom,⁴⁶ each time giving Cato as his authority. Valerius tutem alacriorem redderent," while Varro,⁴⁸ referring to the same custom, says that the singers were *pueri modesti*. Horace also refers to such songs,⁴⁹ and Macaulay attempted to give an imitation of them in his "Lays of Ancient Rome." Granting him, as we may, a fair degree of success in reproducing their spirit, although their form was of course quite different, it is clear that such lays were not biography, although they contained material for such writings and two powerful impulses to their composition. The theory of Perizonius, which Macaulay followed, with regard to an early ballad literature is of course generally given up, but we have no ground for doubting the testimony of Cato and Varro as to the existence of the custom referred to.

The Romans possessed a closer model for biographical literature in the funeral eulogies which were spoken from the rostra by a son or some other near relative in honor of distinguished men and women, and in the eulogies of their ancestors by magistrates on their entrance to office.⁵⁰ The former custom must have been a very early one, for Livy tells us⁵¹ that it was first extended to women after the capture of Rome by the Gauls, in gratitude for their contribution to the city's ransom, an indication of the antiquity of the custom, whatever be the truth of the statement itself. The epitaphs of the Scipios may be regarded as condensed summaries of such eulogies, stripped of their minor details. For example:

Cornelius Lucius Scipio Barbatus,
Gnaivod patre prognatus, fortis vir sapiensque,
Quoius forma virtutei parisuma fuit,
Cõsol, censor, aidilis, quei fuit apud vos.

⁴⁶ "Tusc. Disp." IV., 2, 3: gravissimus auctor in Originibus dixit Cato morem apud maiores hunc epularum fuisse, ut deinceps qui accubarent canerent ad tibiam clarorum virorum laudes atque virtutes; "Brut.," 19, 75.

Maximus⁴⁷ adds that their purpose was "quo ad ea imitanda iuven-

⁴⁷ II., 1, 10.

⁴⁸ In Nonius, s. v. *assa* (*vox*).

⁴⁹ "Odes," IV., 15, 25 ff.

⁵⁰ For the former see Polybius, VI., 53-54, and for the latter, Suet. Tib., 32, 1.

⁵¹ V., 50, 7.

Taurasia, Cisauna, Samnio cepit;
Subigit omne Loucanam opsidesque abdoucit.⁵²

In the eulogies themselves fuller details were given, as we see from Cæsar's funeral oration on his aunt Julia, a part of which is quoted by Suetonius.⁵³ In this oration Cæsar undoubtedly had a political purpose, as Napoleon had in his "Histoire de Jules César," and on other similar occasions, the opportunity was taken to justify one's own conduct or that of an ancestor.

That this custom led to the composition of formal biographies or at least to the publication of the funeral addresses themselves is a priori probable, and we have a parallel in the development of oratory as a branch of literature. According to Tacitus⁵⁴ the custom of publishing accounts of the lives of distinguished men (*clarorum virorum facta moresque posteris tradere*) was an ancient one (*antiquitus usitatum*), and we have references to such works, including autobiography,⁵⁵ at a comparatively early date. The custom naturally was given a fresh impulse by the growth of individualism at Rome, beginning with the domination of men like Sulla in times which might well be referred to by Tacitus as ancient, and reaching a high point with the foundation of the Roman empire.⁵⁶ To this period belongs one of our few surviving specimens of ancient biography, twenty "Lives" from the "De Viris Illustribus" of Cornelius Nepos, published about 44 B.C., which are of quite a different type than those of Suetonius.⁵⁷

It is unnecessary to mention in detail, or to refer to all the biographies and autobiographies of which we have mention in this epoch and that of the early Empire.⁵⁸ While our only other surviving example is the "Agricola" of Tacitus, the interest of the Romans in this form of literature is sufficiently obvious.

⁵² C. I. L., I., 30.

⁵³ Julius, 6, 1.

⁵⁴ Agricola, 1.

⁵⁵ See West, "Roman Autobiography," De Vinne Press, 1901.

⁵⁶ The same personal element appears in the historical writing of the period; cf. Leo, *l. c.*, p. 319.

⁵⁷ See Leo, *l. c.*, pp. 193 ff.

⁵⁸ For numerous references, and on autobiography as an original creation of the Romans, see West, *l. c.*

Although it may fairly be maintained that biography was original with the Romans, and although in the nature of the case the "Lives" of Suetonius are independent so far as their subject matter is concerned, the latter naturally followed the established rhetorical rules for the composition of such works. Just as Horace adopted the verse forms of Alcaeus and Sappho, so Suetonius took as his pattern the biographies of the Greek "grammatical" type,⁵⁹ since his purpose was not eulogy, but an impartial account, according to his own views of impartiality. Such merits, however, as his work possesses, and such defects as it labors under, are due to himself and not to any great extent to his models. That the books, interesting and valuable as they are, do not take first rank as literature is because he did not have the pen of a Tacitus; that they are rated no higher as an historical source is due to his lack of critical judgment.

The style of Suetonius is that of the investigator and scholar, rather than the man of letters. His purpose is clear statement, rather than rhetorical adornment or dramatic effect. He had no leaning towards the style which Seneca had made popular in his earlier years,⁶⁰ or that of the archaizers who set the fashion during his later life.⁶¹ His ideas of an appropriate style appear in what he says of that of Augustus,⁶² much of which might be applied to his own writings. As might be expected of a scholar, his choice of words is accurate and forceful, while his sentences are as a rule terse and packed with meaning. Now and then he turns out phrases worthy of Tacitus, but these seem to be due to his subject matter, like his intensely dramatic passages,⁶³ rather than to any conscious departure from his usual unadorned, "businesslike," and somewhat monotonous style.

Suetonius had at his command a wealth of sources of information, the greater number of which are lost to us, including historical works, memoirs, public records and documents, and private corre-

⁵⁹ Leo, *l. c.*

⁶⁰ Cf. Calig., 53, 2: *Senecam tum maxime placentem*; Nero, 52.

⁶¹ See Seneca, "Epist.," 114, 13.

⁶² Aug., 86.

⁶³ For example, the death of Julius Cæsar (82) and of Domitian (17), and the last hours of Nero (49).

spondence, published and unpublished. His intimacy with Pliny gave him access to senatorial opinion, while his position under Hadrian opened to him the imperial archives, either directly or through his colleague *Ab studiis*.⁶⁴ Few men could have had such opportunities, and he seems to have been as diligent a collector of material as the elder Pliny.⁶⁵ While he made little use of the inscriptions which are so highly valued in our day,⁶⁶ this was due to the abundance of his literary material and to the plan of his work. He occasionally makes use of them and shows an appreciation of their value.⁶⁷

In general his methods are rather those of the scholar and investigator than of the inquirer and observer. He is a diligent searcher of records, but rarely records hearsay evidence, gathered from his grandfather and other men of the earlier time, or the results of his own observation.⁶⁸ As he comes nearer to his own day, when the former material was more scanty and the opportunities for gathering information of the latter kind more abundant, his interest visibly wanes. In the rare cases when he gives us an insight into his method of handling his material, as in the discussion of the varying opinions about the birthplace of Caligula,⁶⁹ he seems to examine it with care and good judgment, whenever he considered it necessary to do so; but the plan of his work seldom called for such critical methods, and it is quite possible that he has given us notice of all the cases in which he employed them. What he mainly desired was entertaining anecdotes and personalities, and he drew them indiscriminately from every quarter, either not realizing, or trusting his reader to discern that impartial opinions about Augustus were not to be expected in the letters and speeches of Mark Antony, or that one historian was not as trustworthy as another.

The result is that none of the Cæsars cuts a very heroic figure

⁶⁴ See Macé, *l. c.*, p. 110 f.

⁶⁵ Pliny, "Epist.," III., 5, 17.

⁶⁶ See Dennison, "The Epigraphic Sources of Suetonius," *Amer. Jour. of Arch.*, sec. ser., II., pp. 20 ff.

⁶⁷ See Aug., 7; Tib., 5; Calig., 23; Claud., 41; and for a full discussion of the subject, Dennison, *l. c.*

⁶⁸ See the references in note 15.

⁶⁹ Calig., 8.

in his pages. The great Julius appears as an unscrupulous politician, who aimed at supreme power from his earliest years and regarded any means of attaining it as justifiable.⁷⁰ He was ready to join in any attempt at revolution which seemed to promise success.⁷¹ In spite of his moderate use of his victory and his many plans for the welfare of the state, Suetonius apparently believes that he deserved the fate which overtook him.⁷² For Augustus and Titus he has an evident admiration, yet his method does not allow him to pass over the former's cold-blooded cruelty⁷³ and calculating seduction,⁷⁴ and the latter's violence, debauchery and shameless avarice.⁷⁵ In fact, his conscientiousness leads him even to record charges which he himself rejects.⁷⁶ On the other hand, he scrupulously recounts the good deeds and qualities of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, although it is evident enough that his general opinion of those emperors is far from favorable. Vespasian fares best, for he is charged only with penuriousness, and even this Suetonius is inclined to justify on the ground of necessity.⁷⁷ Perhaps the most dramatic career of the whole series is that of the hard-headed, humorous Sabine, roused to seek political preferment only by his mother's taunts,⁷⁸ and retaining his simple habits and good common sense even after becoming ruler of the state. He bitterly offended Nero by going to sleep or leaving the theater while the emperor was singing,⁷⁹ was pelted with turnips at Hadrumetum,⁸⁰ and daubed with mud by order of Caligula for neglecting his duty of keeping the streets clean,⁸¹ a fitting punish-

⁷⁰ Julius, 30, 5.

⁷¹ Julius, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11.

⁷² Julius, 76, 1: *prægravant tamen cetera facta dictaque eius, ut et abusus dominatione et iure cæsus existimetur.*

⁷³ Aug., 13, 27.

⁷⁴ Aug., 69, 1.

⁷⁵ Titus 7: *constabat in cognitionibus patris nundinari præmiarique solitum.*

⁷⁶ Claudius, 1, 5.

⁷⁷ Vesp., 16, 3.

⁷⁸ Vesp., 2, 2.

⁷⁹ Vesp., 4, 4.

⁸⁰ Vesp., 4, 3; Suetonius's naive sentence is worthy of a full quotation: *exim sortitus Africam integerrime nec sine magna dignatione administravit, nisi quod Hadrumeti seditione quadam rapa in eum iacta sunt.*

⁸¹ Vesp., 5, 3.

ment for the offense and one of the flashes of genius of the madman who called Livia a "Ulysses in petticoats"⁸² and dubbed Seneca's style "sand without lime."⁸³ While Vespasian lurked in retirement, fearful of Nero's vengeance for a lack of appreciation of his histrionic talents, opportunity found him in the form of the war in Judæa, which called for an energetic and able leader, such as Vespasian had shown himself under Claudius in Britain, and at the same time one whose humble origin made it safe to trust him with a great army. On becoming emperor he acquired the prestige and sanctity which were lacking in a parvenue prince by performing miracles,⁸⁴ but how little his head was turned is shown by the last joke of the inveterate humorist, uttered on his death-bed, "Woe's me! methinks I'm turning into a god."⁸⁵ Finally we have the fine picture of the sturdy old man struggling to rise and meet death on his feet, as an emperor should,⁸⁶ and dying in the arms of his attendants.

Although Suetonius doubtless intended his method to be strictly impartial, and though it would have been more nearly so in the hands of a more critical writer, it does not in reality give us a fair estimate of the emperors. To realize this we have only to imagine the biography of some prominent man of our own day, made up of praise and censure drawn indiscriminately from the organs of his own party and those of the opposition, and presented with little or no comment. So far from accepting his statements at their face value, the critical reader will hardly regard the judgment recently expressed by Professor Botsford as too severe:⁸⁷ "in the case of an author like Suetonius the student of history may begin his examination by rejecting, at least provisionally, everything that could not have been known to the public at the time of its alleged happening or that is not vouched for by trustworthy documents. This process of sifting will leave a substratum of facts on which the investigator may

⁸² Calig., 23, 2.

⁸³ Calig., 53, 2.

⁸⁴ Vesp., 7, 2.

⁸⁵ Vesp., 23, 4.

⁸⁶ Vesp., 24.

⁸⁷ *Amer. Jour. of Phil.*, XXXIV., p. 88.

proceed according to his judgment to build his historical edifice." It is one of the weaknesses of Ferrero's interesting and suggestive work, that he now accepts the testimony of Suetonius and now rejects it as mere gossip, according to its relation to his own theories.

One cannot but wonder somewhat at the freedom with which a member of the imperial household⁸⁸ ventured to speak of the emperors of the past. It must be remembered, however, that Hadrian had no family connection with the men of whom Suetonius writes, and that the failings and vices of his predecessors made the virtues of the reigning prince more conspicuous. But consistently with the general plan of the work, we find no trace of that contrast of the evil days of the past with the happy present which appears in the third chapter of the "Agricola." We have only the very moderate remark at the end of the "Life of Domitian," where after speaking of the dream from which that emperor inferred a happier condition of the state after his death, Suetonius says: "sicut sane breve eventit, abstinentia et moderatione insequentium principum."

Suetonius has been stigmatized as a scandal-monger and a man of prurient mind. The former charge seems not to be justified. He did, it is true, collect all the damning details which seemed to him interesting, but even in the case of emperors like Caligula and Nero he is equally conscientious in assembling all that can be said in their favor. The so-called scandal-mongery is, in fact, a feature of the development of realism in the writings of the imperial period⁸⁹ and of an interest in all the details of the private life of prominent men.

The second charge is based in part on the accounts of the sexual habits of the emperors, and in part on the fact that he wrote a work "On Famous Courtesans." The latter argument may be dismissed as unconvincing, since the work has not come down to us and we have no means of knowing how the subject was treated. The former no more convicts him of pruriency than the amusing stories and witticisms which he has diligently collected justify us in crediting him with a sense of humor, in spite of numerous indications to

⁸⁸ The "Caesars" was published while Suetonius was Hadrian's secretary, apparently in 120.

⁸⁹ See H. T. Peck, "Julius and Augustus," introd., pp. v ff.

the contrary.⁹⁰ In reality these details are presented with the same judicial coldness which is characteristic of his work in general, and he cannot be called obscene in the sense in which we may apply that term to Martial and Juvenal, for example. His discussion of such matters is undeniably plain and frank, but it must be remembered that the ancient conception of *pudicitia* was very different from the modern one.⁹¹ Moreover the feeling which to-day leaves certain of his chapters in the original Latin or expresses them in veiled language is of comparatively recent date. Holland, for instance, in 1606 found no embarrassment in translating Suetonius into the frankest English and dedicating his book "To the Right Honorable and Vertuous Ladie Harington."

While it is obvious that we must regard the "Lives of the Cæsars" more or less in the light of a work of fiction, it deserves to be read as our best and most characteristic specimen of Roman biography, albeit with an open mind and in a spirit of scholarly scepticism.

⁹⁰ This subject will be discussed at another time.

⁹¹ See Julius, 49, 1.